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MEMORANDUM FOR: 40 Committee
SUBJECT: IDEALIST Program

1. In December 1969, the President approved continuation of the IDEALIST Program through FY 1971 and directed the 40 Committee to review the project again prior to consideration of the FY 1972 budget. To assist in this review, information is provided herein on the current status and capabilities of the program.

2. The CIA IDEALIST Program provides a means of mounting "covert" reconnaissance flights by the improved U-2's in times of crisis or in areas where cloud cover inhibits satellite coverage. The IDEALIST fleet is postured to react rapidly to world-wide contingencies and without attribution to direct U.S. Government sponsorship. Its aircraft have a high expected survivability over China and most potential crisis areas. The assets of the program (airplanes, major equipment and facilities) are paid for; the annual operating costs, including such R&D as necessary to keep the aircraft equipment and countermeasures up to date, is [redacted]

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3. Present IDEALIST operational assets consist of six U-2R aircraft at two permanent bases. One detachment is at Edwards Air Force Base, California, with four aircraft;

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All aircraft are maintained in an operationally ready posture. Both bases have a capability for world-wide deployment and an aircraft can be over its mission target in about 50 hours after alert. The IDEALIST U-2R is also certified for operations from selected U.S. aircraft carriers.

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5. The following information summarizes the capabilities of specific IDEALIST Program assets:

a. Photographic Systems: The "H" Camera System can cover an area from 225 to 1370 nm in length. It can be used in vertical or oblique positions. The "H" achieves [redacted] resolution vertical and, standing off from the target, three foot resolution at 25 nm, depending on atmospheric conditions up to eight feet or so at 50 nm. IRIS II system can acquire 2100 to 3600 nm linear coverage, a 60 to 70 nm lateral coverage, [redacted]

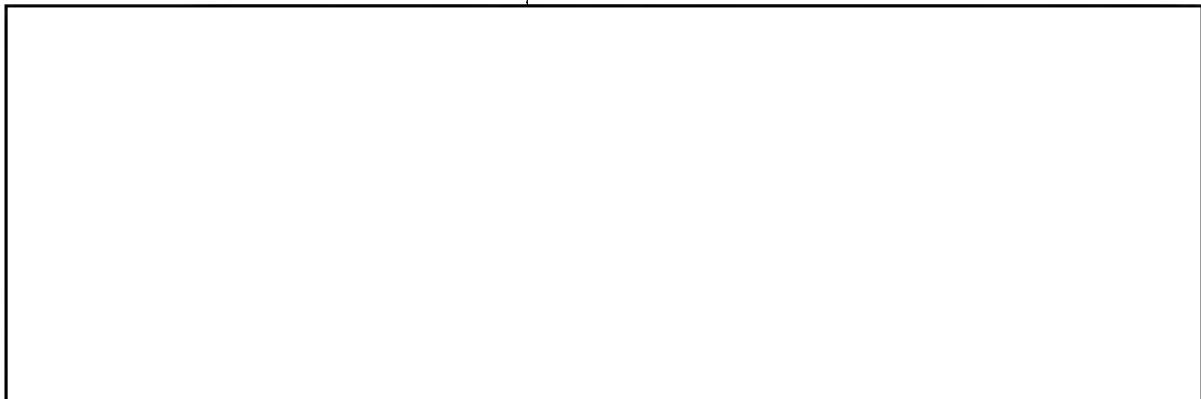
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[redacted] vertical resolution.

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(2) Thus the survivability of the U-2R flying over mainland China is high. The MiG has little capability against it - as was demonstrated when a Chicom MiG-21 attack was successfully evaded last October - and the known SA-2 sites can be avoided by proper flight planning. [redacted]

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(3) On the other hand, the survivability of the U-2R is decreased over countries with a dense SAM deployment [redacted]

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8. Finally, two other factors must be mentioned to round out a full discussion of those considerations that are relevant to a judgement about the future of the program.

a. The Likelihood of Use of IDEALIST in Future Contingencies. Since the last overflight of China in March 1968, policy makers have not seen fit to authorize

an overflight of sensitive areas with a U-2, and it is reasonable to ask whether this implies that no such authorizations are likely over the next few years. In fact, this seems to be the basic judgement on which a decision about the program must rest. Although there is no way to make a direct argument on this, it is worth noting that each overflight decision in the past was uniquely determined by the particular political and security circumstances existing at the time. The history of the U-2 program since its advent in 1956 shows that a wide variety of circumstances led U.S. policy makers to deploy the aircraft in the face of the risks involved over the USSR, Eastern Europe, Communist China, North Korea, North Vietnam and Cambodia.

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[redacted] Although at that time there were few alternatives to the U-2, it is still true that the U-2 has unique characteristics of "covertness", quick reaction, technical adaptability to a mission requirement and low cost which might make the difference in some future contingency between approving or disapproving an overflight mission.

b. "Covertness" of Operations. The question arises whether there is something unique about CIA management of the program that allows operations less

sensitive to political risk. After all, since the downing of Gary Powers in 1960, the silhouette of the aircraft has become a distinctive U.S. trademark. The present CIA program, however, does still provide the capability to operate in a quiet and unattributable way without provocative military implications, a capability which would be difficult for another operation to maintain.

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Therefore, in our

opinion, the present capability cannot be maintained by:

a. Transferring the hardware to the U.S. Air Force. In addition to the question of attribution, cooperation with the CIA and cooperation with an overt U.S. military organization are different matters when viewed by countries such as those with whom we have been and potentially might become involved.

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